

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
MIDDLE DISTRICT OF ALABAMA
XXXXXXX DIVISION
Northern

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Sylvia Jones, individually and on behalf of all others similarly situated; DEBRA P. HACKETT, CLK 2:20-cv-879-WKW-JTA
U.S. DISTRICT COURT MIDDLE DISTRICT OF ALABAMA Action No: _____

Plaintiff,

CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT

DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

-v.-

Mountain Run Solutions, LLC and JOHN DOES 1-25,

Defendant.

Plaintiff Sylvia Jones (hereinafter, "Plaintiff"), an Alabama resident, brings this Class Action Complaint, by and through her attorneys, against Defendant Mountain Run Solutions LLC (hereinafter "Defendant" or "MRS"), individually and on behalf of a class of all others similarly situated, pursuant to Rule 23 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, based upon information and belief of Plaintiff's counsel, except for allegations specifically pertaining to Plaintiff, which are based upon Plaintiff's personal knowledge.

INTRODUCTION/PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

1. Congress enacted the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act (hereinafter "the FDCPA" or "the Act") in 1977 in response to the "abundant evidence of the use of abusive, deceptive, and unfair debt collection practices by many debt collectors." 15 U.S.C. §1692(a). At that time, Congress was concerned that "abusive debt collection practices contribute to the number of personal bankruptcies, to material instability, to the loss of jobs, and to invasions of individual

privacy." *Id.* Congress concluded that "existing laws...[we]re inadequate to protect consumers," and that "'the effective collection of debts" does not require "misrepresentation or other abusive debt collection practices." 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692(b) & (c).

2. Congress explained that the purpose of the Act was not only to eliminate abusive debt collection practices, but also to "insure that those debt collectors who refrain from using abusive debt collection practices are not competitively disadvantaged." *Id.* § 1692(e). After determining that the existing consumer protection laws were inadequate. *Id.* § 1692(b), Congress gave consumers a private cause of action against debt collectors who fail to comply with the Act. *Id.* § 1692k.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

3. The Court has jurisdiction over this class action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1331 and 15 U.S.C. § 1692 et. seq. The Court has pendent jurisdiction over any state law claims in this action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1337(a).

4. Venue is proper in this judicial district pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1331(b)(2) as this is where a substantial part of the events and omissions giving rise to the claim occurred.

NATURE OF THE ACTION

5. Plaintiff brings this class action on behalf of a class of Alabama consumers under §1692 et seq. of Title 15 of the United States Code, commonly referred to as the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act ("FDCPA"), and

6. Plaintiff is seeking damages and declaratory relief.

PARTIES

7. Plaintiff is a resident of the State of Alabama, County of Autuga, residing at 1352 Kingston Oaks, Prattville, AL 36067.

8. MRS is a "debt collector" as the phrase is defined in 15 U.S.C. § 1692(a)(6) and used in the FDCPA with an address at 313 E 1200 S., Ste 200, Orem UT 84058-6910.

9. Upon information and belief, Defendant is a company that uses the mail, telephone, and facsimile and regularly engages in business the principal purpose of which is to attempt to collect debts alleged to be due another.

10. John Does 1-25, are fictitious names of individuals and businesses alleged for the purpose of substituting names of Defendants whose identities will be disclosed in discovery and should be made parties to this action.

CLASS ALLEGATIONS

11. Plaintiff brings this claim on behalf of the following case, pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(a) and 23(b)(3).

12. The Class consists of:

- a. all individuals with addresses in the state of Alabama;
- b. to whom MRS sent a collection letter attempting to collect a consumer debt;
- c. that included threats regarding credit reporting and demanded immediate payment, overshadowing the "g-notice";
- d. which letter was sent on or after a date one (1) year prior to the filing of this action and on or before a date twenty-one (21) days after the filing of this action.

13. The identities of all class members are readily ascertainable from the records of Defendants and those companies and entities on whose behalf they attempt to collect and/or have purchased debts.

14. Excluded from the Plaintiff Class are the Defendants and all officer, members, partners, managers, directors and employees of the Defendants and their respective immediate

families, and legal counsel for all parties to this action, and all members of their immediate families.

15. There are questions of law and fact common to the Plaintiff Class, which common issues predominate over any issues involving only individual class members. The principal issue is whether the Defendants' written communications to consumers, in the forms, attached as Exhibit A, violates 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692e, 1692g.

16. The Plaintiff's claims are typical of the class members, as all are based upon the same facts and legal theories. The Plaintiff will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the Plaintiff Class defined in this complaint. The Plaintiff has retained counsel with experience in handling consumer lawsuits, complex legal issues, and class actions, and neither the Plaintiff nor her attorneys have any interests which might cause them not to vigorously pursue this action.

17. This action has been brought, and may properly be maintained, as a class action pursuant to the provisions of Rule 23 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure because there is a well-defined community interest in the litigation:

- a. **Numerosity:** The Plaintiff is informed and believes, and on that basis alleges, that the Plaintiff Class defined above is so numerous that joinder of all members would be impractical.
- b. **Common Questions Predominate:** Common questions of law and fact exist as to all members of the Plaintiff Class and those questions predominate over any questions or issues involving only individual class members. The principal issue is whether the Defendants' written communications to consumers, in the forms attached as Exhibit A, violates 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692e, 1692g.

c. **Typicality:** The Plaintiff's claims are typical of the claims of the class members.

The Plaintiff and all members of the Plaintiff Class have claims arising out of the Defendants' common uniform course of conduct complained of herein.

d. **Adequacy:** The Plaintiff will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the class members insofar as Plaintiff has no interests that are adverse to the absent class members. The Plaintiff is committed to vigorously litigating this matter. Plaintiff has also retained counsel experienced in handling consumer lawsuits, complex legal issues, and class actions. Neither the Plaintiff nor her counsel have any interests which might cause them not to vigorously pursue the instant class action lawsuit.

e. **Superiority:** A class action is superior to the other available means for the fair and efficient adjudication of this controversy because individual joinder of all members would be impracticable. Class action treatment will permit a large number of similarly situated persons to prosecute their common claims in a single forum efficiently and without unnecessary duplication of effort and expense that individual actions would engender.

18. Certification of a class under Rule 23(b)(3) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure is also appropriate in that the questions of law and fact common to members of the Plaintiff Class predominate over any questions affecting an individual member, and a class action is superior to other available methods for the fair and efficient adjudication of the controversy.

19. Depending on the outcome of further investigation and discovery, Plaintiff may, at the time of class certification motion, seek to certify a class(es) only as to particular issues pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(c)(4).

FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

20. Plaintiff repeats, reiterates and incorporates the allegations contained in paragraphs numbered above herein with the same force and effect as if the same were set forth at length herein.

21. Some time prior to February 13, 2020, an obligation was allegedly incurred to

22. The Monitronics obligation arose out of a transaction in which money, property, insurance or services, which are the subject of the transaction, are primarily for personal, family or household purposes.

23. The alleged Monitronics obligation is a "debt" as defined by 15 U.S.C. § 1692a(5).

24. Monitronics is a "creditor" as defined by 15 U.S.C. §1692a(4).

25. Monitronics, or a subsequent owner of the Monitronics debt, contracted with Defendant to collect the alleged debt.

26. Defendant collects and attempts to collect debts incurred or alleged to have been incurred for personal, family or household purposes on behalf of creditors using the United States Postal Service, telephone and internet.

Violation – February 13, 2020 Collection Letter

27. On or about February 13, 2020, Defendant sent Plaintiff a collection letter (the "Letter") regarding the alleged debt owed to Monitronics, with an outstanding balance due in the amount of \$1372.30. See a true and accurate copy of the Letter attached as Exhibit A.

28. When a debt collector solicits payment from a consumer, it must, within five days of an initial communication, provide the consumer with a written validation notice, known as a "G notice," which must include the following information:

29. (1) the amount of the debt;
30. (2) the name of the creditor to whom the debt is owed;
31. (3) a statement that unless the consumer, within thirty days after receipt of the notice, disputes the validity of the debt, or any portion thereof, the debt will be assumed to be valid by the debt collector;
32. (4) a statement that if the consumer notifies the debt collector in writing within the thirty-day period that the debt, or any portion thereof, is disputed, the debt collector will obtain verification of the debt or a copy of the judgment against the consumer and a copy of such verification or judgment will be mailed to the consumer by the debt collector; and
33. (5) a statement that, upon the consumer's written request within the thirty-day period, the debt collector will provide the consumer with the name and address of the original creditor, if different from the current creditor. 15 U.S.C. § 1692g(a) (emphasis added).
34. This letter contains the “G-Notice” but it is completely overshadowed by other statements in the letter.
35. Although a collection letter may track the statutory language, “the collector nonetheless violates the Act if it conveys that information in a confusing or contradictory fashion so as to cloud the required message with uncertainty.” Russell v. EQUIFAX A.R.S., 74 F. 3d 30, 35 (2d Cir. 1996) (“It is not enough for a debt collection agency simply to include the proper debt validation notice in a mailing to a consumer – Congress intended that such notice be clearly conveyed.”) Put differently, a notice containing “language that ‘overshadows or contradicts’ other language informing a consumer of her rights … violates the Act.” Russell, 74 F. 3d at 34.

36. Defendant's Letter states: This account has been purchased by our company from Monitronics and is in collections. Your payment of 1372.3 is due immediately. Please send payment without delay to....

37. The letter demands immediate payment.

38. This demand, made during the initial thirty-day period, only serves to coerce the consumer into paying immediately in lieu of exercising her right to validate or dispute the debt provided her under the "G-Notice."

39. Defendant failed to provide Plaintiff, a consumer, with a proper initial communication letter which overshadowed Plaintiff's rights under the FDCPA.

40. After a paragraph containing the G-Notice, the letter further states: Your account has been scheduled to be reported by our office to one of the following national credit reporting bureaus: Equifax, Transunion and Experian. If you have difficulty making payment please call us.

41. This language completely overshadows the "G-Notice" by scaring Plaintiff into making payment immediately to avoid negative credit reporting instead of exercising her statutory right to dispute the debt as provided by the FDCPA.

42. This language is threatening to the consumer and coerces payment from the consumer by making threats during the initial thirty-day period.

43. Defendant failed to provide Plaintiff, a consumer, with a proper initial communication letter which overshadowed Plaintiff's rights under the FDCPA.

44. As a result of Defendant's deceptive, misleading and unfair debt collection practices, Plaintiff has been damaged.

COUNT I
VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT 15 U.S.C. §1692e
et seq.

45. Plaintiff repeats, reiterates and incorporates the allegations contained in paragraphs above herein with the same force and effect as if the same were set forth at length herein.

46. Defendant's debt collection efforts attempted and/or directed towards the Plaintiff violated various provisions of the FDCPA, including but not limited to 15 U.S.C. § 1692e.

47. Pursuant to 15 U.S.C. §1692e, a debt collector may not use any false, deceptive, or misleading representation or means in connection with the collection of any debt.

48. Defendant violated said section by:

- a. Making a false and misleading representation in violation of §1692e(10).
- b. As the Letter it is open to more than one reasonable interpretation, at least one of which is inaccurate.

49. By reason thereof, Defendant is liable to Plaintiff for judgment that Defendant's conduct violated Section 1692e et seq. of the FDCPA, actual damages, statutory damages, costs and attorneys' fees.

COUNT II
VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT 15 U.S.C.
§1692g et seq.

50. Plaintiff repeats, reiterates and incorporates the allegations contained in paragraphs above herein with the same force and effect as if the same were set forth at length herein.

51. Defendant's debt collection efforts attempted and/or directed towards the Plaintiff violated various provisions of the FDCPA, including but not limited to 15 U.S.C. § 1692g.

52. Pursuant to 15 USC §1692g, a debt collector:

Within five days after the initial communication with a consumer in connection with the collection of any debt, a debt collector shall, unless the following information is contained in the initial communication or the consumer has paid the debt, send the consumer a written notice containing –

1. The amount of the debt;
2. The name of the creditor to whom the debt is owed;
3. A statement that unless the consumer, within thirty days after receipt of the notice, disputes the validity of the debt, or any portion thereof, the debt will be assumed to be valid by the debt-collector;
4. A statement that the consumer notifies the debt collector in writing within thirty-day period that the debt, or any portion thereof, is disputed, the debt collector will obtain verification of the debt or a copy of a judgment against the consumer and a copy of such verification or judgment will be mailed to the consumer by the debt collector; and
5. A statement that, upon the consumer's written request within the thirty-day period, the debt collector will provide the consumer with the name and address of the original creditor, if different from the current creditor.

53. The Defendant violated 15 U.S.C. §1692g, by threatening negative credit reporting and immediate payment, which overshadows the "g-notice" language and coerces the consumer not to exert its rights under the FDCPA.

54. By reason thereof, Defendant is liable to Plaintiff for judgment that Defendant's conduct violated Section 1692g et seq. of the FDCPA, actual damages, statutory damages, costs and attorneys' fees.

DEMAND FOR TRIAL BY JURY

Pursuant to Rule 38 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, Plaintiff hereby requests a trial by jury on all issues so triable.

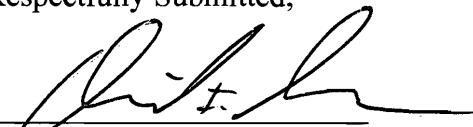
PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff Sylvia Jones, individually and on behalf of all others similarly situated demands judgment from Defendant MRS as follows:

1. Declaring that this action is properly maintainable as a Class Action and certifying Plaintiff as Class representative, and David I. Schoen, Esq. as Class Counsel;
2. Awarding Plaintiff and the Class statutory damages;
3. Awarding Plaintiff and the Class actual damages;
4. Awarding Plaintiff costs of this Action, including reasonable attorneys' fees and expenses;
5. Awarding pre-judgment interest and post-judgment interest; and
6. Awarding Plaintiff and the Class such other and further relief as this Court may deem just and proper.

Dated: October 26, 2020

Respectfully Submitted,


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PRO HAC VICE APPLICATION
TO BE FILED